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LAY EFFORT;
ITS RANGE AND METHODS.

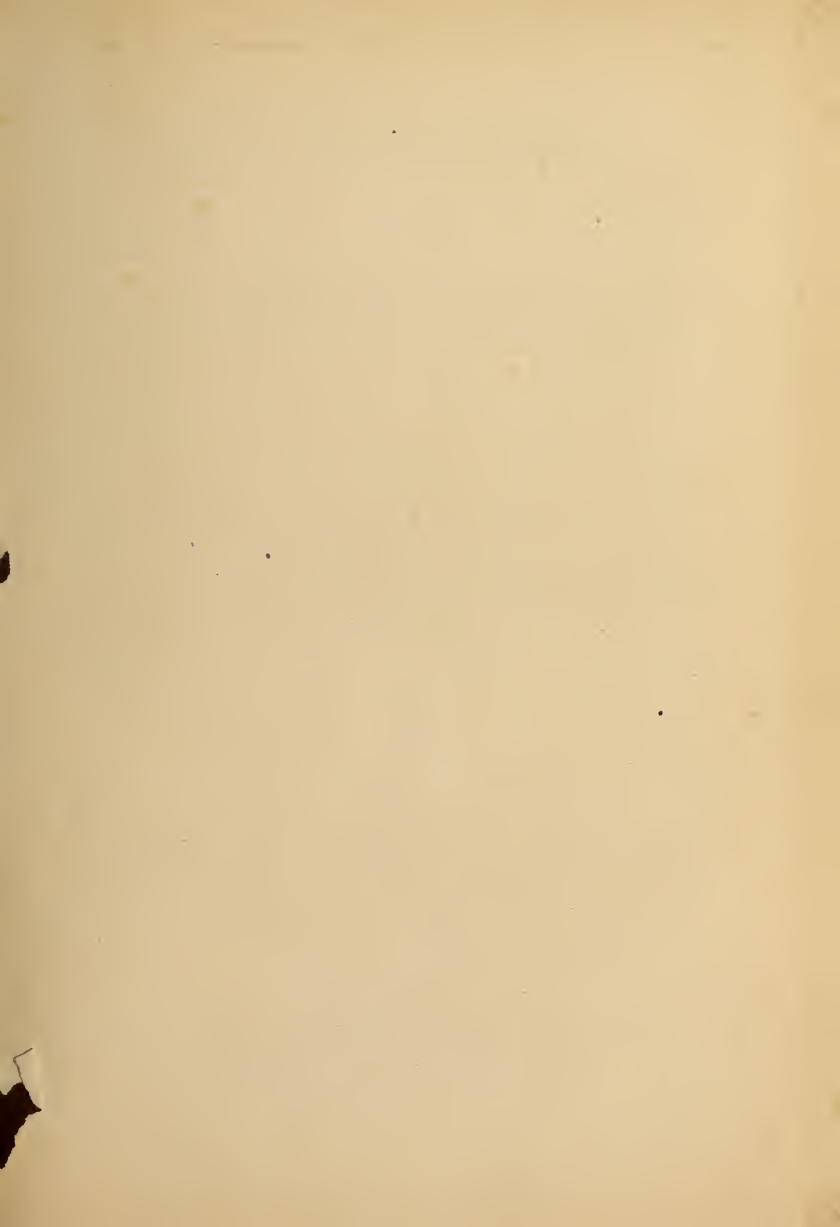




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LAY EFFORT;

ITS RANGE AND METHODS.

BY THE

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CLEVELAND, O.

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INTRODUCTION.

IT is a fit thing to be said, that for substance these pages are the outgrowth of three or four lectures to lay-workers under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Association of Cleveland, O., in the winter of 1874. They were free, informal talks, as to personal friends, mostly young men. In the revision and re-cast of them it has not seemed best to throw them out of the style of direct address then assumed. They are given to the larger public, partly at the suggestion of those who heard them, partly by reason of the conviction that what was then thought to be useful to a few earnest men, may be found to be of service to the vastly greater number who, in the Church of Christ, are not content to be enrolled as members, but must likewise see to it that, in some good degree, they fulfill the commission which repeats itself in the ears of each new recruit in the army of the Lord.

So far as I know, this is the first venture in print, aside from a few fugitive newspaper articles, in this direction.

Doubtless, it will seem to many that going thus far, it were well to have gone farther ; to have covered more ground and to have treated the several points with more fullness. But the aim has been rather to throw out hints which might become fruitful in those that receive them, and to bring what is said within easy reach of every Christian worker who may have the faintest desire to possess himself of the contents of these chapters. This end a larger book might possibly have defeated.

Some one more capable to instruct and stimulate the active young membership of our churches, though probably not more closely in sympathy with what is best in the restless activity of our age, may follow after with wiser counsels. The thought shapes itself into a well-defined hope that so it may be. A pressing want just now is to have done for the Young Men's Christian Association what is being done for the Sunday-school workers of the Church of our time. It will have been enough for me to have contributed something in this direction.

I.

THE MINISTRY AND THE LAITY.

THE Church of Christ consists of ministers and laymen. What she does for the world is done by the one or the other, or both conjoined. Their sphere is not identical, though in the same field.

There is probably no work of the laity which the ministry may not with propriety do. The Apostles called into existence the order of deacons, not on grounds of propriety, but of expediency; and gave the service of tables and the care of the poor into their hands.

There is, doubtless, a sphere of the ministry which, so long as they are laymen, the laity may not with propriety enter. It is well to recognize at the outset the fact that there has always been a body of men called out and separated unto the special service of God. They ministered at the altar under the Old, they give themselves to the ministry of the Word and the ordinances of Christ under the New dispensation.

“God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.” Unquestionably, the greater includes the less. An Apostle might traverse the whole range of gifts below him, but a teacher might not assume the apostolic function.

The “fitness of things” rather than any express command, requires the laity to respect the function of a called, educated, and ordained ministry of the Word. That all things may be done decently and in order, for self-protection and in self-respect, the laity will insist that the ministry administer the sacraments and be the recognized leaders of the Church in the work of the world’s evangelization. And the ministry will insist upon this prerogative, not in a narrow spirit of jealousy, but as being in harmony with the will of God. They can truly say, with Paul, “I would that ye all spake with tongues;” and with Moses, “Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets.” They can rejoice, so far as they are concerned, that Christ is preached, though sometimes with questionable wisdom as to matter and manner. But nobody should forget that Saul and Jeroboam as-

sumed for themselves the priestly function not with impunity; and that the jealousy of Miriam and Aaron over the preëminence of Moses was summarily rebuked of the Lord.

The rank and file of an army have no occasion to be jealous of their commissioned officers, or to be ambitious to vault into their places. Neither can get on without the other. The success of the one order of men is the success of the other. The crown of the one is the crown of both. So it is with the ministry and the laity in the Church of Christ. They both work under the same Lord, for the same ends, each in his own sphere, and they lay their laurels at the feet of Christ, in profound and grateful humility—"not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thy name be glory." But each works in his own sphere, and all the better for that.

There should, then, be no antagonism between the ministry and the laity; no jealousy, no rivalry, but the utmost degree of mutual confidence and helpfulness. The ministry will welcome the laity to a share in the work of the Church as the best thing—because the Divinely appointed thing—for the laity, the ministry, and the world.

The laity will recognize the ministry as Divinely

appointed, called and taught by the Spirit, to expound the oracles of God, to administer the sacraments, and be the natural leaders of the Church in her onset upon the hosts of darkness.

It may happen, now and then, that some will ignore all church relations and go "bushwhacking" over the world—even sparing not the Church of Christ, in a sort of conceited conviction that thus God is to be honored. But such will always be sporadic, and their example is not likely to prove contagious.

It may sometimes happen that a minister of the Gospel will become jealous of the greater success of his lay brethren. But this will be exceptional. It must be borne with patiently, as a weakness which will, most likely, cure itself. While the great army of Christian workers, ministers and laymen, will forget their differences, and magnify their onenesses, strong in each other's strength and glad with a joy which is heightened in each by what the other feels.

II.

LAY-WORK AS CHURCH-WORK.

BY lay-work is meant the service of the laity in promoting the ends for which the Church exists.

There is nothing that ought to be done for Christ and the moral improvement of the world, with which the Church is not bound to feel the deepest sympathy, and in which it is not her place to have a shaping hand. The mission of the Church covers all lands, peoples, classes, conditions. It not only inspires direct endeavors to make the world better, it welcomes the indirect as her allies.

The Church is the spiritual host of God upon earth. Christ, her Head, is Captain of salvation, and the Bible-truth is her weapon of offense and defense.

The Church is the grand reservoir of spiritual life and power, in the world and for the world, continually fed from the fullness of God, for the world's good.

To the Church is given the commission: "Go, preach my gospel to every creature." Her life is to be aggressive. Her work is to disciple all nations; and having made disciples, to instruct, edify, comfort, and set them to work in the great world-field.

The Spirit of God resides in the Church, mightily to endue with power and enrich with increase.

There is nothing novel in these plain statements. They are rather the commonplaces of our faith. But we can not get along without axioms. It were well that we keep them in mind. Starting from these, lay-work is not something outside the Church, but of it—of her very heart and life—the outflow of her union with Christ. Of course, there can be no antagonism as between lay-work and church-work, as sometimes seems to be intimated. Lay-work is the Church fulfilling her appointed mission through the laity, as through the ministry she fulfills another part; and so completes the circle of her influence. All Christian work, not exclusively ministerial, is lay-work. Whatever form it takes, under whatever name organized, whether men go out singly or in companies, it is still the Church that goes forth, and to the Church is brought the ingathered result, and to the Head of the Church,

from whom comes the efficient power, belongs the glory.

It is to be assumed that there is something for every disciple to do. That something is a variable quantity. The talents range from one upward. Some are fitted for one sort of work, and some for another. Some have great versatility, and can turn their talents into any channel of usefulness. It sometimes happens that God calls from among the laity, men like Messrs. Moody and Whittle, to be evangelists of no common order. He bids them forth from the ranks of the Church, as He called David from his flocks and Elisha from his plow to stir up their brethren and powerfully to persuade men to be reconciled to God; and indirectly, even to instruct the ministry how to reach men; to disclose sources of power long overlooked, and ways of handling the Word of God, not taught in the schools of theology, but given them by the Spirit of God. There can be no doubt of the call of these men to do the specific work that they attempt. Observe, they do not attempt to do the work of the stated ministry; they do a work of awakening and incitement, using the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit. Men are converted in great numbers,

who are to be instructed, led on, and built up in the Church of Christ, through the less conspicuous, but patient and long-continued, labors of the stated ministry. It is noticeable how these Spirit-taught men universally honor the official minister of the Gospel and put no slight upon the sacred office.

It does not fall within the scope of this little treatise to speak of such exceptional men, except to recognize them as lay-workers, as they are. We bless God for them. We would that all the Lord's people were prophets of a regal sort, versed in the Bible, and taught by the Spirit to win souls.

We also recognize among the sisterhood, women, each powerful in her way to expound the Word, or plead for the outlying peoples who have not the Gospel. We bless God for these Spirit-taught women. We see in them the fulfillment of the word God spake by His prophet: "It shall come to pass, in the last days, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. . . . And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." Some are thus called to give up all their time to study and service of a sacred character. But what especially con-

cerns us is to see all who love the Lord, scattered no matter how, going forth, as did they spoken of with approval in the Acts, preaching the Word.

Here are the rank and file of the Church, to be utilized in this great and glorious work, though, for the most part, they are men and women of secular callings and home duties, absorbing, of necessity, a great part of their time and strength. Of lay-work within the scope of such, we would fain speak. Yet not so to speak, but that any person able to command a day, a week, a month, now and then, may find here matter worthy of serious attention.

III.

THE RANGE OF LAY-WORK.

THE range of lay-work will be found quite ample, though you stop short of the careers of the great evangelists, though there should be no publicity about your work, though your name never gets into the newspapers.

Let me briefly indicate what is meant.

1. *The Field.*

I set before you a globe on which is pictured the lands of the world which are thickly peopled with living souls. I say to you, yet not I, but Christ, "The field is the world;" your field, though you never leave your native township, and have no special gifts, and are absorbed in your chosen vocation. For you belong to Christ. Your vocation is His, and Christ is for the world.

Every soldier in the battalions of the nation had his company, his regiment, his division, his

army corps; but they of the East and they of the West, the naval and the land forces, were working in a common cause, to one end, with the profoundest interest in each other's success or failure. The work of each was the work of all, though they did their fighting, some at one point and some at another.

It can not be too heartily accepted nor too strongly emphasized—"The field is the world." It needs to be so taken home as that no one of you shall ever be heard saying: "I believe in Home Missions. I don't care a fig for Foreign Missions." "I don't believe in wasting time and money on the Indians and the Chinese!" Or this: "I believe in Sunday-schools, or colportage, or association work, or temperance, or work for railroad men, and I don't care for anything else! This work I am doing absorbs all my time, thought, energies, money!"

The attitude is unchristian. Such talk is harmful to the very cause at heart. The love of Christ enswathes the world. He was lifted up to draw the world to His feet. He taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come." Not our kingdom, but the kingdom of Heaven. Our kingdom may be very

little. God's is very great and grand. The saved will be of all kindreds and tongues. How is their salvation to be effected? How are they to believe? They will hear the Gospel. How hear? Somebody will preach the Word. How preach? The Church, you and I, will pray, and give, and send the living preacher and the printed page. There is no other way. How unwise, then, to let your specialty overtop the world. The world is greater than any one of its parts. Take it all in if you would do the best thing for yourself, and the Christ you love, and the world you seek to make better. Standing by the cross, we are not likely to make any mistake. The large-hearted Christian is he who remembers that the field is the world. The narrow and bigoted is he who thinks his patch the only affair of any moment. Such men run in ruts, instead of taking wing and rising now and then into the clear ether to look abroad over all kingdoms, and say, "All things are mine, for I am Christ's and Christ is God's!"

Christ has a right to expect that every one of you will pray, and work, and give, and study to do this intelligently, for the coming of His kingdom in all the world. It is the privilege of every one to

so inform himself as to rationally answer all cavils and objections to the work of missions anywhere on the face of the earth. It is a part of the responsibility of every layman. It is not for one moment to be supposed that the intelligent Christian Church, say, of the last fifty years—men of letters, statesmen, shrewd business men, deeply conscientious and consecrated men and women—has been going on year after year, investing millions of money and precious lives in great numbers, without reason or sense! And when a layman sets about magnifying his influence in this direction, informing himself so as to stir up other souls, making money to support a teacher, minister, or school on the other side of the globe, or on the distant frontier of his own land, let it be understood that there is no more legitimate work than this that a layman can do. This is not said to the disparagement of home work, but in dissent from the attitude which sees nothing else but the needs at our own doors.

2. Lay-work within the Church.

Turning now to the work into which the laity may go in person, there comes into view, first of all, the local work of the Christian Church.

In an active church this will be varied, sometimes tasking. And if the church is not active, the more need that an earnest man go to work till the fire is kindled. I lay stress upon this, for the hope of the world is, first of all, in a living Church. The hope of all missionary organizations, Christian associations, leagues of moral reform, is, first of all, in the Church. These measures grow out of the Church, not the Church out of them. They are none of them destined to outrun or outlive the Church of Christ. Their average measure of spiritual life and power will not exceed the average life of the church of their time.

It is, therefore, not well that any man should be known as a Christian worker solely, outside his church relations. Let him first make his power felt at home, then when he goes forth he takes the sympathies and prayers of his church with him—a good many times more a man for this mighty support. I am aware that this is often undervalued; or, if this sympathy be desired, and is not at once forthcoming, men become testy or discouraged. Be patient. Do your duty honestly, humbly, in self-forgetfulness, and you will at length get all you can modestly ask of sympathy and support. It takes

time to grow oaks. It takes time to knit hearts about one's own. It takes time to get power enough to command sympathy and co-operation in large endeavors. Be patient, and know assuredly that in your own church home your power should first be felt. Let us have living churches; giving, praying, working churches, and then we shall have active associations and missionary boards for Christian work in the world at large. But how can this ever be, if the earnest, working disciples spend their strength first and largely outside the local church?

We gladly make place for the exception. There may be times when an outside stir is the only thing that will wake up a dead church; just as sometimes a work of grace seems to break in upon outsiders before the church is aroused. But this is not the rule. It has the force of an exception and no more.

Let us open this lay-work in the local church somewhat in detail.

First.—Do not be indifferent to anything that is to be done in the name of the church. It is worth striving after, to so hold a specialty to which we feel called, as at the same time to have a genuine interest in the work of everybody else. Your bed

of roses in the garden will appear to much better advantage if all the other beds are nicely cared for. It is a mistake to have no interest in any work but our own—not to care if all the rest of the garden be overrun with weeds and brambles. It matters so much that the chances are all against you in your special work, if others are not up in their special work too. The thing to be aimed at and striven for is to have the heartiest co-operation of all in each item of endeavor—the whole church conspiring, now to this end, now to that. Now, all are giving for some one cause. Again, all are praying for some brother, some soul out of Christ, some mission-field or worker. Now, a prayer-meeting is being held for which all are responsible. To-morrow, a sociable to fuse the life of the church calls all to participation. The Sabbath-school has its claims upon all. This society, and that band of workers, not only summon their respective members, but the sympathies of all to make an assured success. Let the entire work of the church be taken up in this way, and there is no possibility of failure. There is no resisting the might of such concert of heart, and prayer, and effort. Not to do this is not to be loyal to the divine ideal of the Church as the

body of Christ, which makes every member a suffering or rejoicing factor in the experience of every other member. It is to mar the beauty of the household idea in the church. And how often is it marred by disjointing our theory and our practice. Hold them together and insist that our theory shall run out into practice, and you revolutionize the actually current life in most of our churches.

Second.—Go into the sanctuary on the Sabbath. Worship is in the ascendant, but here is also a service with ends beyond itself, the hour, the place, or the worshipers. Begin your work as a layman. Lift your heart with the minister mightily in prayer. Do not be lazy, or listless, or unbelieving, or gazing about the house of God. Pray earnestly and importunately that the opportunity may not be wasted. Enter into praise in the same spirit. Listen to the Word as for your lives. Are offerings of money called for, make an offering, be it ever so small, only do it willingly and according to your ability. Do not excuse yourself because you can not do much. Little is often very much. The poor may be great-hearted in giving their very small sums. The Master has His own way of reckoning. It is far other than the style of the market-place.

These are simple, ever-recurring opportunities where the laity should make themselves felt much more than they do. And when the Word is preached, pray and listen, for to preach it over and over in the life of the week is that for which the church is left in the world. It is probable that many who have never found anything they could do for Christ, have quite overlooked the Sabbath-service as a sphere in which to begin. I insist that just because of regarding the sanctuary as a sort of saint's rest where nothing is expected of worshipers but that they yield themselves passively to be wrought upon, the service has ordinarily been shorn of much of its power.

Third.—Pass to the social meeting for prayer, praise, and conference. Here the personality of the laity is to express itself, as in the pulpit the personality of the ministry is felt. It ought, in some way, to be very generally so. To learn how to promote a live, edifying, spiritual prayer-meeting is a great acquisition. A prayer-meeting of this sort is an achievement. It is worth study, prayer, thought, to learn how to ensure this.

Prayer-meetings are killed, sometimes by the leader, sometimes by the led ; or those who ought

to be led and are not. Except in extraordinary cases, to read a long chapter, and sing long hymns, and make long and rambling prayers, is to kill a meeting. It must have great vitality to endure this and not be killed. Usually when the leader says, I will read such a chapter, the announcement sends a chill through every earnest soul. Not the chapter, but the probability that the whole meeting will be pointless, tedious, limited to three or four persons.

A prayer-meeting is a delicate thing to handle. To lead a meeting well is so great an achievement that only here and there one can do it. I suspect the reason to be, that lurking in the heart of many is the mischievous notion—"Anybody can lead a prayer-meeting." No man so esteeming it will stir himself up as for some truly difficult achievement. If a leader can come to it warm, prayerful, with snatches of kindling and comforting song at command, a short, well-selected portion of Scripture and a pointed, suggestive word about it, sending it home to the hearts of the people, so that they will want to say something and can not help praying; not too learned, not overshadowing, never reading from a book or paper, or if so, not more than the

briefest paragraph—all this in about fifteen minutes, there is a fair probability that the meeting will be a success.

Even when the meeting has been well opened, thought set running and devotion kindled, it is quite possible that some brother may get up, and starting from some frigid zone of feeling and interest, move forward into the Divine presence with a formal introduction, and on to an “appropriate” close; and when done, the effect upon the meeting is much like that of an iceberg moving down from polar seas upon the waters it invades! The figure must not be pursued further, for a meeting does not usually last long enough to melt such. Why should anybody do so? The prayers of a social meeting should be fragmentary, spontaneous, burdened with some definite need, and the unity, if that is essential, be sought in the continual praying of all, from the leader’s to the closing prayer. It would put new life into almost any meeting, if the formal prayers and the traditional phraseology could all be left at home. If a request for prayer comes, let it be taken up heartily and left without first offering a generalizing prayer, upon which to tack the special petition. It is really worth while

to rise to one's feet, to pray for one soul—just to say, and mean it, “God be merciful to me a sinner”—to recite a verse of Scripture or sacred song, and say how it has been helpful; this and nothing more. To sit and say a word or two in a social meeting is really well worth while. It is not always quite easy to do these simple things. But it is something to see that such simple things are worth doing, at any cost. That they must be done by somebody, if the social meetings of the church are to be quickening and helpful, is certain. The most efficient in such service have generally fought the toughest of battles to overcome their hinderances. They were once timid to a degree which lost them all command of their thoughts the moment they rose to their feet. This has certainly been true of some of the best lay-workers I ever knew. They battled for success and won. It needs humility and sanctified purpose to persevere upon a basis of common sense and piety. This only. But, unfortunately, many people are too proud to ever be good for much in a prayer-meeting. If they could pray and talk like some eminent saint who has been through all manner of tribulations: wounded pride, advice to be silent, tempta-

tions of the devil—if they could edify as he seems to, they would speak and pray. Can ye drink of their cup? Will ye be baptized with their baptism?

Better yet, be childlike. Enter the church, the work of the church, the study of the Bible, as a little child. Creep, then walk; stumble, then stand; stammer, then talk. We are satisfied if our children are men and women by and by. But where is the young convert that is willing to be a man *by and by*? He wants to start with the eloquence of a Storrs, the versatility of a Beecher, the fire of a Moody. He wants to go into conic sections before he has mastered addition. He would read Homer before he has learned the Greek alphabet. To succeed as a lay-worker in the prayer-meeting, as elsewhere, a man must be willing to fail. He must think very little of the honor to accrue to himself, and very much of the honor to accrue to Christ.

Let it go around, from heart to heart, among the sisterhood as well—for are they not of the laity?—a word, a short prayer, a verse of Scripture, a bit of experience, a simple incident, a question, a verse of sacred song, shall be my contribution to the social gatherings of prayer and praise which I am privileged to attend. And to do this better and better

shall be my prayerful study, as if it were indeed an acquisition worth the pains it is likely to cost.

Fourth.—Come into the Bible school.

Here is work for every layman; and grand work it is. Teach, if you are needed as a teacher. Go into the library if wanted there, but go into a class if you can. Count this the thing to be coveted; and if called out of it to teach, always plan to go back to it, if the way is open. Never get too old to be in a class as a learner. Never imagine you have learned all there is to be learned out of that wonderful Book. Imagine the amazing conceit of a young man who offered himself as a teacher. There being no vacant class at the time, he was invited to go into a Bible-class, but declined, actually saying that “he had studied the Bible enough, and did not care to go in unless they wanted a teacher!”

You may be called to be a superintendent, a teacher, or a scholar. The work varies with the position, but the opportunity to be an earnest, progressive, enthusiastic worker is to be found in either place.

If a scholar, make it your business to be regular, prompt, well prepared in the lesson; to bring in others and fill the class to overflowing; to promote

esprit du corps, and make the class-life wholesome and stimulating. How many never go into a class except as so many passive receptacles, seeing in this no sphere for aggressive Christian work.

If a teacher, be regular, prompt, well-versed in the Scriptures, enthusiastic. Get your scholars to do what has just been suggested as their privilege to do. Draw the class around you and teach, out of a full head and a warm heart, the lesson you have so well mastered as to dispense with lesson papers and notes altogether. Talk and question out of yourself, charged with the truth and its practical bearings, and never bring into a class your lesson helps to be as a sheet of ice between you and them. In the week go to their homes, get them to yours, conquer their hearts, then lead them to the living Word and through the Word to Christ. Believe you have got a great mission, which is nothing less than to anchor these souls to Christ and usefulness in the world. To have done this, and to keep doing it, is to have done a grand work. Oh, how grand, as time goes on, to follow the classes thus led, and see these boys and girls go out at length as men and women consecrated to kindred work for the Master. Look into their

eyes and forecast their future, and say, "God helping me, I will save them from the slippery ways of death. Christ shall have them for Himself!" There is noisier work than this which laymen aspire to, but my firm belief is, that to have mastered the art of teaching and winning young souls to Christ, and then to have followed it up week after week for a score or two of years, is to have done what can seldom be rivaled in any department of Christian service.

You may be a superintendent. Next to being a minister of the Gospel, I should covet the fitness and then the position. Indeed, few preachers can claim to have done so much for Christ as some of the superintendents of famed Bible schools in our great cities. The same is no doubt true of many more unknown to fame. First of all, aim to be prompt, warm-hearted, prayerful, full but not gushing, studying the child-mind as well as the Bible, and getting the teachers and scholars to do what we have just intimated they ought to do. Let the inspiration flowing from Christ into your soul, flow from you to every teacher and scholar. Be a progressive man. See that the devotional exercises enlist everybody—singing, reading, recitations of

Scripture, prayer. The more of concert in all this the better, even to the prayer. Formal addresses and prayer, such as befit a social meeting of adults, are not to be commended. The prayer of this service should voice the needs of those present. It ought to touch the child-heart. It ought to be their prayer, not prayer for them. The leader should put himself, as it were, down into the midst of the school and be their mouth-piece. I believe it well that the school often take up the prayer, sentence by sentence, after the leader. It insures adaptation on the part of the leader to the needs and apprehension of children. It secures attention on the part of the school. I am glad talking superintendents have gone out of fashion—excessive talkers, I mean. There should be, under his direction, and by him or the pastor, short, pointed applications of lessons, brief and thorough reviews, and such illustration by the blackboard, object-lessons, and maps as he is able to wield successfully. There ought to be no prejudice against these methods of enforcing truth; there can be no blind or automatic following of other people's plans, if a man is to be successful. Every man called to such a post of honor and in-

fluence needs to work by a method of his own. It is questionable whether any man is so called who does not become something of an enthusiast in it; a sort of condensed Bible school, lugging it in everywhere, and having it crowd his dreams with faces sweet as the face of an angel.

Not many of you will be called to this. Some of you are or will be. Look to it that you do not belittle it in any way, either to your own thought or in your practice, as if it were a thing for odd moments and scraps of time, a work within the reach of any man! If you have the idea that "anybody can run a Sunday-school," be certain that you have no call in this direction. The dignity and the greatness of this work has not yet dawned upon your soul.

Fifth.—The local work of the church will embrace various committee or society responsibilities for specific ends, which are useful in proportion to the zeal, earnestness, and discretion of individuals. It is not a refreshing sight to see such committees made up, or such societies organized and never hear from them again. If there was need to constitute them at all, there is need that every one thus made responsible be found faithful and re-

liable. Such committees, societies, or mission bands have it in their power to help make the church a busy hive of Christian industry and social fellowship, drawing to it for their good those who are without, interesting and edifying those who are within, and opening many a channel of benevolence, for which needy and thirsty souls will give praise to God. Every such organization should ring with life and be redolent with prayer, and love, and usefulness. It should always hold itself subordinate to the official direction of the church, and work in harmony with it. It should never assume the reins, nor imagine that the church exists for its sake, rather than it for the sake of the church, her growth and her usefulness.

Not to dwell upon what must vary with each local church and its mission, let me say, that the phase of lay-work now dwelt upon, work in the church-home of the soul, unheralded service, may be, not noised abroad, humble, sometimes apparently of little account, is the phase that ought first to meet the Christian disciple as he enters the household of faith. Let him first try his hand at some of these things. Here let him be proved, and become indoctrinated and versed in methods

of doing good ; the world may then want him in a wider though not a richer field. There is none richer or more fruitful. Let him first be able to give a reason for the hope that is in him, then move upon others and do the work that comes first at hand.

The church in which these sentiments, as to the work of the laity, take practical shape must needs be a living power for Christ. It will never stop with the work to be done within its own fold. It will reach out to desolate neighborhoods around ; it will be felt to the ends of the earth.

Let me also add this other word. Anybody disdaining such work as I have named, not known in his church as a worker, is a man, with rare exceptions, never to be endorsed for any outside work whatever. Let him first exercise his gifts at home, and prove himself possessed of a right spirit and of good common sense—then bid him God-speed into the wider world, if God wants him and men will receive him. It is safe to say that men will receive whom God indeed sends, and they will want more and more of him. Sometimes men receive those whom they will soon cordially dispense with—men whom God, most likely, never sent.

And when it is thought that in the sphere of the local church the great majority of disciples are to do their work for the Master, the emphasis to be laid upon it, covering its dignity, its worth, and its importance, can not well be exaggerated. To be fitted for it and to do it well, is worth any man's heartiest consecration.

3. Lay-work outside the Church.

We come now to consider that sphere of lay-work which lies outside the ordinary appointments of church-service, and may justly be expected to *follow*. The work of which we speak may or may not be under the direction of the local church or any organization, and is characterized, in part, by publicity; in part, is unobserved of men. It should rejoice the heart of every worker in the vineyard of the Lord that there are very many busy in doing good of whom mention will never be made till the judgment. They tread such quiet, unnoticed paths; they so shrink from observation that but few are really aware of the breadth and result of their endeavor.

Such is the unobtrusive visiting of families, opening the Scriptures, at fitting times kneeling

with them in prayer, leaving a quickening word, a wholesome book, counselling to habits of sobriety and being the good Samaritan, in Christ's name, to families, youth and children, who else would be habitually and only under the tuition of the evil one and his emissaries.

Such is the word dropped by the wayside, the note indicative of fraternal interest or deep solicitude, the wayside conversation, the invitation to the home-circle, thus to fasten a cord around a heart, which thereby may be led to Christ.

I lay stress upon this unheralded service with individuals and families, in humble cottages, boarding-houses and shops, in prisons, hospitals, poor-houses and schools of reform, for several reasons.

Here is found one of the best spheres for the culture of a genuine, earnest, well-balanced piety. The best of motives are called into exercise. It is a work which will foster a love for Christ and a sense of His nearness. Indeed, it is not likely to be carried on at all except under the impulse of love to Christ and a passion for the salvation of men.

It is a sphere in which every man of good sense may do a work for Christ, and find all his resources

called into requisition. The absence of common sense is a thorough disqualification for any work of which we now speak. But starting with this, speech is a universal gift; influence is a universal gift; sanctified, they make every soul a power for good, and make futile the excuses for doing nothing which are often multiplied.

Then, again, this sort of lay-work puts stress upon life, rather than public occasions. It needs no argument to show that a profoundly consistent life makes a word dropped, here and there, of more value than the most ostentatious service without this support. He that has so learned to live that others take knowledge of him, in every-day affairs, as one taught and led by Christ, has no second-rate equipment for doing the Lord's work. And when to this is added the tact which comes through contact with men and the use of the sword of the Spirit in these quiet ways, we are face to face with a man whom it is worth while to send forth in more demonstrative ways of usefulness.

Publicity in Christian work is not a sin, nor is secrecy a virtue. Doing any service for God, *to be seen of men*, has its reward—the scorching penalty

of hypocrisy. But on the other hand, from the highest authority issues the command to every disciple, "Let your light so shine before men that others seeing your good works may glorify your Father which is in heaven." So to shine will lead many into more public paths than those just noticed. But it is to be said that they have temptations peculiar to themselves. In some, work of a public character fosters just that which ought to be suppressed. It is a forcing process instead of a healthy growth. It turns their thought too much from Christ to themselves. Meaning, in all honesty, to hold Him up, they are almost certain to be deeply concerned about their own reputation, their success, how *they* get along; to be, at times, humiliated more from personal mortification than concern for the honor of the Master; at times elated with pride, rather than soberly joyful that Christ was affectingly held up to the view of men. A man happy and successful in obscure and quiet paths is almost certain to be sound in the faith, with a power within that will bear sending out into the larger world. While a man with an itch for publicity, and unwilling to do anything except in a public way, is much more likely to be mistaken as

to the grounds of his personal faith and hope, and to be lifted up himself rather than to be found knowing only Christ and Him crucified.

Therefore, I believe it is a mistake to send out new converts and quite young men to address congregations of people here and there—and especially if they happen to have been dissipated men heretofore. A place might be found for the recital of their experience, under the direction of experienced Christians, but it were better not to make haste even thus far. The good of seeing such men testifying to their new convictions and the saving power of Christ is more than counterbalanced by the inevitable instinct which distrusts them till they have first been proved, and which unfortunately finds too good reason for distrust in the lamentable failure of many so-called reformed men. Unquestionably they should have the hearty sympathy of the Christian public, and every encouragement to hold on and out, for Christ is able to make them stand, and the Church has a place and a work for them. But let the public work, from which men of ripest culture and piety find themselves shrinking, be approached by slow degrees. Then the crudities of inexperience will not

be forced upon audiences who need the steady guidance and impulse of experience somewhat mature, and of heads well stored with the thoughts of God.

It is a thing to be deplored when a prevailing impression is abroad that lay-work is nothing if it be not occupied in calling conventions, holding public meetings, and addressing assemblies. The world is not perishing for this above all things, but it is greatly burdened that so few are willing to take up a quiet, unobtrusive, unostentatious work in the boarding-houses, among the poor, in the shops, among the homeless young men and women of village and city, in the lanes and by-ways, extending a warm greeting to the stranger, looking after him, drawing him from the theaters and saloons by personal acquaintance and influence.

Let it be accepted that here is a grand sphere for lay-effort. On the face of it, presumptively, this is preëminently the outside work, appealing to all who are qualified and willing to work for Christ at all; to be left only when special fitness and the Divine call bids: "Go out abroad, call men together and preach the Gospel of the Kingdom."

The success of famed laymen in public work, so far from throwing into the shade such quiet ways of doing good, so far from stirring up a great company of lay-evangelists, should have just the opposite result ; the result of making men thoughtful and hesitant, lest they run before they are sent. Their work is so manifestly wrought of God through them ; it lies so far beyond being accounted for on purely natural grounds, that every serious man must needs ask himself, Has God given me this endowment, and does He want me as such an instrument ? If so, there is but one thing for him to do ; and but one thing for the Church to do, besides supporting him in his work, and that is, be stirred up, every man who loves the Lord, to magnify his own influence and use his talents in the sphere that lies nearest to him, even as they do in theirs.

This must suffice to indicate the range of lay-work. The field is broad enough, and the work varied enough to utilize all the talent of the Church ; work for the weakest, for the strongest, work for men, women, and children. All classes, conditions, and climes are to be covered by lay-effort in heartiest sympathy and coöperation with the ministry of the Church. And whether done by

churches as such, or through Missionary Boards, or Christian Associations and Christian Temperance Leagues, it is none the less Church work, whose garnered sheaves are laid at the feet of the Lord. And what times are these in which we live, when children have become a great factor in the evangelization of the world, and the sisterhood of the Church are jealously sought by all the Boards of the Church, as best qualified not only to teach, but to fill the depleted treasuries of benevolent organizations.

IV.

THE SPECIFIC END OF LAY-WORK.

NO matter what the department or what specific form of lay-work comes to the front, the end to be sought, the achievement in which effort culminates, is to win men to Christ. If you feed the hungry, or clothe the naked, or kindle a fire on the cold hearth, or put a nosegay into the hand of the sick, or teach a class in the Bible-school, or attend a cottage prayer-meeting, or approach a stranger to bring him into social relations, the effort of the hour is supposed to look beyond to some eternal result. The impression left upon us by the study of the Gospels is that this was habitually in the mind of our Lord—through the bodies to reach the souls of men and impart an eternal benefit. Let it be accepted, the great business of the church is to win men to Christ, making even her humanitarian schemes to minister to this sublime end. Other men may do a great deal of good while aiming not

at all at this. The Christian worker must, of necessity, often stop short of it. But not to aim at it is to make a grievous mistake; is to miss the choicest of opportunities. For the heart that is softened by kindness is most easily led; and led by no one so readily as by a benefactor. It is not to be wondered at that our missionaries find the hospital in foreign lands a powerful adjunct to their endeavors at evangelization; or that men, saved from famine in Persia or India, through the benefactions of Christian strangers, are led to listen to the story of the Gospel with more willing ears. There is not only no occasion for wonder in this, but it is right that it should appear how our benevolence links itself with our Christian civilization, and that, with Christ himself; and to use it to bring the people nearer to Him. It is, therefore, not a refreshing spectacle to see the church, or any association of Christian people, instituting one measure and another, good enough in themselves, but with no ulterior end beyond the satisfactions of the hour.

The delicacy of this business of winning souls is not enough thought of. The method of some to rush into it as if handling old iron or beating a bass drum, is quite shocking to a sensi-

tive mind, and often hurtful to the last degree. The reserve which most people feel in reference to laying bare their inmost thought, the painful burden borne in silence, often so long, the shrinking from observation, the Nicodemus-like approach of many souls to Christ for light, ought to instruct us to walk softly here. Rudeness, harshness, bluntness, the off-hand, slap-on-the-shoulder, "How's your soul to-day?" are offensive not only, they do harm, often immeasurable harm. The delicacy of the attempt to win men need not deter us from effort or tie our hands. It needs simply to be accepted that such is its nature, and brooded over, and allowed to influence our approaches to men; and none the less, though it is possible to quote some eminent names and very useful men as practicing the very methods we deplore. Happily we have some illustrious models in the persons of Christ and His Apostles, to whom it were far wiser to give heed.

The universality of the gift for winning souls is not enough considered. I hold that everybody is somebody's oracle. No soul is so inconsequential but that it may draw some other to itself. If this be true, let every one use that power for Christ. No

soul need wear a starless crown in the kingdom of heaven. It is not a question of learning, but of living and shining; not of doing great things, but out of the loving heart putting forth the tendrils which fasten delicately, but firmly, on another heart. It is often done beautifully by children. It needs always a child-like spirit.

The simplicity of this work is not enough dwelt upon. I do not mean that of instruction and nurture, but of winning men; setting them to thinking, inquiring, feeling after God, praying in secret, at length to cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" then, if need be, to be taken in hand by others for guidance and instruction. How often a word fitly spoken, a question artlessly put, the genuine interest of the heart expressed, however simply, is the first link in a chain of causes leading to a new life. Could more fitting words have been spoken to the haughty Syrian general by any professor of the schools than the Jewish, captive [^]maid's: "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather when he saith unto thee, wash and be clean?" Simplicity always lends a charm to spiritual effort, of whatever sort.

x mistake

V.

QUALIFICATIONS.

THE qualifications for lay-work are, as far as they go, the same as for ministerial service. Preparation for the ministry differs rather in degree than in kind. I name among the very first—*a genuine humility*. I know of no work or place where humility does not appear at advantage. But in Christian work, of all things, let pride and conceit be put away, and a genuine humility clothe every one who hopes to get access to other souls and lead them to the light. We are not prepared to talk with sinners unless we have a deep sense of being ourselves sinners, saved by grace. And so, when approaching men in the name of Christ, we do well to embrace ourselves in our conversation and prayers. Use the first persons plural, and speak of *our* sins—*our* needs—what Christ has done for *us*—God's mercy to *us*—how *we* have requited Him. Sitting down by some hardened

man, may be, use the words that yoke yourself with him as in the same condemnation, instead of standing off, you the saint and he the sinner, and his will be a very hard heart, if it does not soften. This is quite as true of public as of private address, except in extraordinary occasions, like some of our Lord's encounters with the Pharisees, when one must needs remove himself as far as possible from the sin he condemns. But you will observe the object of such address is not to win.

It follows that there are very many harangues at congregations of sinners which were far better left unsaid. Denunciation is not winning. Anything that separates a Christian man from those he seeks to help and save—except the fact that, though a miserable sinner, God has had mercy upon him, and put a new song into his mouth, and therefore he has what the other has not, and shows it—ought to be buried out of sight. What is said, both as to matter and manner, one's dress and bearing, should never be allowed to contravene the impression of being a genuinely humble man. What is needed at this point is to get down with the lowest, heart to heart, and say, "Come, let *us* go to Christ. He invites *us*. He will receive *us*."

Let us go to Him." All this is genuinely becoming. There is nothing put on for effect. In the deepest sense, there is no difference at the critical point of need. If our walks are among the poor, manifestly, for our own ease and comfort as well as on their account, it were well to go in plain apparel—not shabby, but plain—to go informally and put them at their ease; and with consideration, not patronizingly, as went the Master.*

2. Closely allied with this is *self-forgetfulness*. A self-conscious man, moving among others, leaves the impression of condescension as toward them, and of being quite indispensable to the Lord. The man who seems never to think of himself, or his doings, or of being anything but an instrument upon which and through which the Divine Spirit works to win men to Christ, thereby greatly enhances his usefulness. And so to *seem* he must really *feel* it.

Perhaps it is not amiss to say that Mr. Moody seems to have attained this virtue to a wonderful

* This point is beautifully illustrated by Dr. Arnold's letter to one who refused to see the clergyman of the parish or to allow his friends to speak to him on religious subjects. *Letter 82, Am. Ed.*

degree. One more honored of the Divine Spirit since Apostolic times it would be difficult to name. But he seldom speaks of his doings. He seems always purposely to turn attention from himself and to prefer to be hidden behind the cross. That smallest of words "I," which towers like a mountain in the speech of so many lesser men, is kept small, and God in Christ overshadows all. The same is true of most greatly useful men and women. Keep that "I" out of sight, I beseech you. Tell what the Lord has done and leave men to guess what "I" did. Be content to be a voice, a "persuasive voice" if the Lord will, on which the Divine message may flow to the hearts of men.

3. A useful man must be full of *loving earnestness*. This is zeal, and it is more; it is tender as well as hot. There must be fire if wood is to be kindled. Speech must be stirring if men are to be moved. The heart must glow if the message is to tell. Nothing can be more out of place than a man going forth to talk to his fellows of Christ, or to address a congregation on sacred themes, because he thinks he must, or that somehow it is to minister to his own advantage. The theme is so mo-

mentous, the interests at stake are so immense, that men instinctively reject a lukewarm man. Let him first get his own heart aflame, and then the message will be fused in it and men will listen because they can not help it. That man has our cordial sympathy who, being really earnest at heart, is somehow so overladen with a sluggish manner of thought and expression that all he says gets cool before it reaches his audience. We need to leave upon men the impression of being tremendously in earnest. Find a man greatly useful in the cause of Christ, either as a layman or a minister, and you will find a man in earnest. Two little books written by John Angell James, entitled "An Earnest Ministry" and "The Church in Earnest," are so well calculated to kindle the believer's soul, that it seems a pity they are not familiar to all of this generation. The loving earnestness of this saintly soul well qualified him to speak to the Church of his time of that which he so well illustrated in his life.

This quality of which we speak is something not easily counterfeited. Like sincerity, with which it ought ever to be in wedlock, it commends itself, when genuine, through the voice, the eye,

the expression, the manner, before the people and in private, so as seldom to be mistaken. It is a native quality of the soul ingrained by the truth of God and fused by His Spirit.

4. There is also needed a pervading *reverence for sacred things*. This can not be insisted upon too earnestly. Reverence need not throw us into sanctimonious ways and tones; but, being natural and seemly, will hold us back from that familiar way of speaking of the most awful and sacred themes which can but shock a sensitive nature. Many, in their zeal to make religious matters the subject of familiar conversation, do grossly prejudice the serious mind against all their endeavors to do good, by their shocking irreverence and "vulgar chatter" while dealing with truths of infinite moment.

5. *Tact*.—Being humble, self-forgetful, earnest, and reverent, there is needed, preëminently, tact in reaching men, and a clear, sound view of the Gospel way of salvation.

Many seem not to think this very essential in doing good. It seems to them rather a profane intrusion into sacred matters to talk about the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove in getting at men. Experience is prob-

ably the only teacher whom such will be likely to respect—and her tuition is often dearly bought.

How serious a matter this is, will at once appear, when it is remembered that there are as many avenues to human hearts as there are hearts to be approached. To know which one to traverse in a given case, to get a soul to be willing to let you in, and so to open your message as not to have the door closed and barred against you ; to take an audience and first draw them into a listening attitude—calls for discretion. To know how far to go this time, to choose occasions, to discover by a happy intuition whether the mood is favorable and seize the opportune moment to let fly the arrow of Gospel truth, calls for thoughtful consideration and a happy tact, such as will not commonly be found except in a man ever on the alert, and in intimate communion with the Spirit of God, who searcheth all things. This is sanctified common sense. No ordinary emphasis belongs to that word sanctified in this connection. In all Christian work, preëminently in this of leading men to Christ, to ignore or slight the quickening and guiding agency of the Holy Spirit is suicidal.

Without sanctified tact a man will be crowding

in upon others when burdened with business, or heated with passion, or hurrying off on a journey, or surrounded by his companions, in no mood to be singled out, then and there, for serious admonition. It is doubtless true, in the abstract, that men ought to be willing to seek first the kingdom of God, and at once to welcome that obligation. We have, among other things, to see to it that we do not drive them farther from the kingdom by our imprudence. We desire to get this great matter fairly before them, and we can not ordinarily do it except as we watch for the fitting moment. We need tact in our endeavors at winning men.

6. We need, not less, *a clear conception of the way of salvation*. The more thoroughly versed in the Scriptures a man is, the better; but the How to be saved; the answer to that oftentimes urgent question, What shall I do? is a matter that every disciple ought to study so as to present it with clearness. It is a humiliating thing for one who has found Christ, not to be able, intelligently, to point an inquirer to Him. It is a serious matter to give misleading directions. Erroneous teaching at this point may encourage false hopes, may set a man on the track of legality instead of grace, may make it

almost certain that after a little while the supposed convert will be found back again in the ranks which he thought he had left, but in all which he was mistaken. The counsel given to inquirers in the moments of their eager search will often be found to run through all after-life. We want genuine conversions, not reformatations simply. We want the whole soul for Christ, and Christ received as the one, complete Saviour for the soul, and now; not souls set on the track of self-improvement to be saved chiefly by their own exertions, Christ coming in to make up their defects.

In my judgment, this is one of the points where the lay-work of our time is most at fault, often harmful. The Gospel is perverted and souls are misled. To tell men, whose ear you have got, how to be saved—this clearly, simply, only—is a matter for most prayerful thought. Men of large experience in the ministry have noted how much more clearly they can do this at some times than at others; how the Holy Spirit, at times, sets this matter in wondrous clearness before the mind. How much more, then, do the inexperienced need to familiarize themselves with God's way of saving men? I know of no study that ought to go before this.

There is a very simple preliminary test which

any man can apply to himself just here. Let him ask himself the question,—“If an inquiring soul were to come to me, just now, for light and guidance, saying, ‘What shall I do to be saved?’ what would I say to him? Suppose I should say, ‘Go to Christ;’ and he should ask, ‘What is it to go to Christ?’ ‘How shall I go to Him?’ Believe. ‘What is it to believe?’ Repent. ‘What is it to repent?’” Can you give an answer to these inquiries, satisfactory to yourself? A kindred emphasis falls on the inquiry—What motive shall I employ in speaking to men to lead them to consider their ways and turn to the Lord?

As I have intimated, this must be regarded as a most vital matter, to be made sure of by all lay-workers, as well for their own sake as for others’ sake, lest the blind lead the blind and both fall into the ditch.

There is usually left the resource of seeking a counselor of experience in a mutual friend, to whom you will resort with such as you can persuade to accompany you. It were better always so, than to give blinding or misleading directions; but how much better to be prepared for any emergency by a thorough study of the Scripture response to such vital inquiries.

VI.

MISTAKES.

IN considering some of the mistakes of lay-work, it will occur to you that they are not peculiar to the laity. They are not to be ignored, however, because many, if not all of them, are often chargeable upon ministers of the Gospel as well. Some of them are such as are liable to occur in public address and private conversation on religious subjects, even in well-informed circles. Nor will it be expected that I shall do more than hint at a few, and only with a view of enhancing your usefulness.

It will occur to you that we have already touched, incidentally, upon many things which might be grouped under the head of mistakes. But leaving them to stand as they are, let me indicate, still further, some which are incidental and some which are vital.

Incidental Mistakes.—Of these I have hinted when speaking of manner in address and in approaching

men—of adaptation even to the matter of the apparel to be worn in reaching certain classes, so that the first impression may be always that of a man in earnest, a man humble, sincere, hidden by the cross, and moved by unaffected love for the souls of men.

Mistakes are often made at this point which burden or block the way of all after-attempts at successful approach to those whom we wish to win to Christ.

Passing on, it seems clear that—

1. *Sensationalism*—things said and done just for effect—is to be ranked among the mistakes which are by no means infrequent. The less one really has to say, the more is he tempted in this direction. The more superficial the man, the more certainly will he run into this to make up or cover up his deficiencies. There is no objection to a legitimate sensation. We must have it, or apathy reigns, and that is death. A legitimate sensation comes from the truth pressed closely home to the hearts of men, in a fair, clear, pointed, well-illustrated presentation. This is something that men will carry away, and think over because they must: the sensation deepening, the more they think.

Not so when a ripple of excitement is created

by an astounding attitude, or piece of uncertain intelligence, or by the putting of truth in startling ways, which if soberly heeded—if not treated as extravagances—would belie the truth.

The more these things are thought over, the more certain the reaction, and the worse for the next attempt to interest men in that which is vital to their welfare. Extravagant statements of fact, or interpretations of Holy Writ may make a momentary impression, but they will bring little fruit unto perfection.

Worse yet is it "where extravagant religious emotion becomes a hackneyed, fashionable thing, imitated half unconsciously by weak men and women." Thus "a great and serious damage is done to the cause of Christ."

2. Alongside this I would put the story-telling sort of address, wherein it is too evident that the stories are first laid out, and the effort is to link them together in connected discourse. This may be very entertaining, if the stories are well told and they wear an air of probability. But this is making a staple of what, at best, should be sparingly introduced. This is not to wield the sword of the Spirit.

3. Again, it is often forgotten that an illustration that may be effective in one place, with one set of people, may be quite out of place in a different community. Discourse may be dignified and yet adapted to occasions and peoples, so that our fishing for men shall have, at least, as much skill in it as fishing for trout.

4. Exaggeration and romance in religious work are serious mistakes. I once worked side by side with a brother, in a time of religious interest. So often as we met, he had wonderful accounts to tell of meetings just held, reporting in round numbers the attendance, inquirers, conversions, and so on. I got in the way of bringing him down to details, with surprising result. A walk of a few rods served to show how grievously exaggerated were his reports.

I know another man in whose hand an incident will be dexterously handled and as dexterously embellished, so that it never appears twice as exactly the same story, even when it happens to be a matter of fact or personal experience.

It is nothing to the purpose to say that such persons mean all right. They ought to *be* right. Both of them seriously embarrassed their usefulness by

their—shall I say, unconscious lying? I do not say they meant to lie, but they had fallen into an unjustifiable habit of exaggerating and romancing about their Christian work till it wore a very unchristian air.

Concerning all such reports of religious meetings, inquirers, conversions, it might be well to ask at the outset,—Was the audience actually counted? If not, everybody ought to know how easy it is to be mistaken; and instead of saying just how many hundreds or thousands were present, it is better to put in qualifying words—to understate rather than overstate.

Experience also teaches us that men are not converted just because they express some interest, or promise some amendment. Wait and see. Let the fruits testify the result. We should be very careful in stating the results of Christian effort. “We went forth to do honest work, and did it. The people were interested, the attendance large, or very large. Many asked the prayers of Christians. Some, or many, seemed fully determined to follow Christ, and we were greatly blessed and helped in witnessing for the Master.” Actual cases of special interest may be very helpful to others, if reported cor-

rectly and soberly. I must think for truth's sake, and out of regard to one's usefulness and the credulity of sober, thoughtful people, in the church or out of it, this is better than saying, "There were five thousand people present; three hundred rose for prayers and two hundred were converted." To know all this is quite impossible; and hence the need of caution in reporting such intelligence.

In the same vein, men sometimes speak of things as accomplished which are only in process of incubation; of promises which are only concessions of interest; and presently matters have dropped out of mention which were said to have hardened into final shape!

Let it be understood we are not impugning the motives of good men, even in their mendacity, of such sort, but it is a serious blemish on Christian service, which should be kept free from needless prejudice, and be always transparent as the day.

5. Religious controversy is for most persons a mistaken way of endeavoring to advance the kingdom. You will often be beset to enter into it, and if the temptation be yielded to, it will quite likely be to your hurt. This is not because of the weakness of the Christian defences, but because of the

sophistry or the skill of your antagonist who is better versed than you in a certain, it may be very narrow, line of argumentation. So that unless certain of a victory, stick to your line of thing, which is to be witnesses to an experience, and heralds of a Gospel whose worth you have proven. One need never hesitate to say, "I leave controversy to others, as also scientific objections. I have nothing to say *pro* or *con*. I am certain they have been answered and can be again. Listen to another class of facts about which I do know."

When these mistakes are spoken of as incidental, it certainly is not meant that they are trivial. I insist that they are serious, but they lie rather in the domain of unconscious habit, or grow out of a sanguine temperament, and are more or less due to inexperience.

Vital Mistakes.—I speak of these as vital because they go to the heart of instruction, and motive, and so-called religious life.

A man may build on the foundation hay, wood, stubble, and be saved so as by fire, because on the foundation, while all his work is burned. But what if we mislead as to the foundation itself?

Mistaken Theology.—In all appeals to men, we

need care—(1) rightly to represent the character of God and His government over men—(2) rightly to represent the character of man—(3) rightly to represent the way of reconciliation.

On these vital points we need Scriptural views, not opinions and conjectures of men.

We need to know, not guess, what the Scriptures teach about God, and man, and reconciliation, and to hold this knowledge clearly and put it forth with confidence. To do this we must have compared Scripture with Scripture. We shall not then be tempted to decry doctrine, for that is just what we go forth to teach ; nor theology, for if we have anything to tell men, if our Gospel is of any account to them, it is because of what it reveals of God. The one need of men is to let God into their hearts and to allow Him to rule in the affections and the will. It is amazing what views of God are current among men; what prejudices bar His approach to them ; what feelings are attributed to Him. A man without a Scriptural theology has missed the first qualification for effective service among men. Yet nothing is more common than to hear indiscriminate flings at theology, and in the next breath the most astounding theology finds utterance. It were

well that it were understood that almost every address to the people on religious themes is likely to have some theology in it, even when laymen are the speakers, and the one concern of every man is to have it Scriptural as far as it goes. Theology is, first of all, a question of fact concerning the grandest of beings, the Infinite God. Take care about the facts lest God be misrepresented. The philosophy of these facts may well be left to the philosophers, whether lay or clerical.

We see the importance, then, of not hanging our doctrine on the uncertain hook of a verse of Scripture which is not pertinent. Proof-texts ought to be very carefully chosen, and not forced out of their just bearings, as men are always tempted to do when they adopt fanciful methods of interpretation, or the catch-word method of some Bible-readers and teachers.

Take the doctrine of God. He is revealed as a Father, and quite as truly as a moral governor. He is love, and He is holy and righteous. He addresses the heart of man and no less his conscience.

It is a serious mistake to fasten on either representation of God to the exclusion of the other. You may press the love and benevolence of God so

far, and in such a way, as to weaken moral obligation and sear the conscience; to lower the claims of righteousness and make sin appear a trivial thing. If God cares little for it, why should we? God, as often misrepresented, is a goodish, kind-hearted, would-be-benevolent sort of being, making shift with sin as a great misfortune, and pitying men as a race of unfortunate beings, whom it were certainly out of place to blame. This is unspeakably mischievous. God is a Father, but a "Father-King." He is love, but love in God is no weak sentimentality making void moral obligation and amounting to indifference to character. It is holy, righteous, burning against sin and wrong, jealous of His law of right, and so transcendent in glory that it not only pities, but at infinite cost lays hold of sinners to set them right, and then unfold to them the glories of His fatherhood and the splendors of His righteous administration over accountable beings. On the other hand, men err by pressing the governmental idea so far as to land men in a fatality which is paralyzing, so far as they are concerned; and we have a dry, severe, cold theology which detracts from the glory and loveliness of the Divine character. It misrepresents God. It is the king without

the father—that is, a despot. Present God as He is revealed in the Scriptures, and you touch both the heart and the conscience. Then mercy and truth kiss each other; righteousness and peace go hand in hand. God ordains and man is free. It is not out of character for Him to chastise and to punish. Pain and suffering are not the worst things—they may lead to the best. It is not out of place for man to repent of his sin and return to such a God. Nay, he must do it or be forever at war with Him.

And so it is a mistake for a man to say, “I preach a gospel of love,” meaning by it that he does not preach a gospel of law. Who tells us to preach such a gospel? Where, in the Bible, is the law of God ever spoken of as a thing made void, or obsolete, or as if in dishonor? Who has a commission to put grace and the moral law in antagonism? Certainly this is not learned at the feet of Him who was careful to say, that He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it; also to add, “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.” And Paul expressly teaches that the grace of God was revealed in Christ, “that the righteousness of the law might

be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Obviously, we need carefully to discriminate between the ceremonial and the moral law; between obedience to the law as a rule of life, and as a ground of justification.

Take the doctrine of man—take it just as it is put in the Scriptures. On this high authority we say he is dead in sins, guilty before God, exposed to His righteous displeasure because of sin, but capable of being reasoned with, admonished, warned, invited, entreated, redeemed, restored—a child of God, but a prodigal, a transgressor of law, and already under condemnation. Such is man before God, judged by the perfect law of righteousness.

Now, I should say it were better to leave unused the theological phraseology. Take the truth just as it stands in the Scripture. Use the words of Scripture. God saith so and so of man. Do not blunt the edge of it, or lead men to think this is true of some great sinners, but not of them. On the other hand, do not represent the Bible as saying men are just as bad as they can be. It does not say so. The doctrine of total depravity never meant that in theology. They are wholly gone

astray, but they can go further, and they will if they do not repent.

Do not represent men as wholly impotent to do anything under a gracious system, nor as all-sufficient without the grace of God. To do this is to mislead. This is not Scriptural teaching. They can do many things; Paul says all things, through Christ. They are bidden to awake, repent, believe, and they ought. The very coming of Christ to them, His call, His "rise and walk," carries with it the pledge of grace to do just what is bidden.

Take the doctrine of reconciliation. You have it in the best possible shape in the Scriptures,—“God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” On this ground comes the “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

Ordinarily, I think it is a mistake to philosophize about the work of Christ—especially the atonement—without thorough preparation for it. Even then, it ought to be remembered that no theory of the atonement can possibly be of so much account as the atonement itself. The true theory of light is im-

portant ; but whichever of many is true, or if none of them thus far propounded be true, light we must have. And fortunately, they who never thought so far as to have any theory about it, may enjoy the light, bask in its rays, and avail themselves of its practical benefits. And it is so of the atonement. Theories of the atonement are not indifferent matters. They may be very serious and misleading. They may be very helpful and stimulating. But a man who never had a theory, or heard a philosophical discussion, may avail himself of Christ and His atoning work just as truly as if he knew by heart the score of theories about it. I venture the opinion that these theories often obstruct the way to Christ—often they are misleading.

This much is certain, God is satisfied with the work of Christ, both as related to love and to righteousness. On account of it God can be just, and at the same time the justifier of him who believeth, whoever he may be, however deeply guilty as a sinner. That is all that is absolutely needful to be known. Whatever hinderance there was in the way of pardon is taken away in Christ. Whatever was needful to maintain the majesty of the law and exhibit the righteousness of its sanctions

—and that something was needful conscience affirms—was done by Him. Whatever is necessary to our complete redemption and fitness for His kingdom is found in Him ; only believe and obey—trust and follow Him. He bore our sorrows and carried our griefs. On Him our iniquities were laid. He laid down His life for the sheep. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life.”

This shows clearly enough—What? That Christ suffered as much as would all the race if condemned to all eternity? Is there anything said in the Bible about the quantity of suffering endured by our Lord? When men go on to tell us just how much Christ suffered ; that He actually “suffered the pain which would have been endured by the eternal punishment of every sinner ;” we may well ask them for their Scripture texts, and how such sweeping statements are to be harmonized with the concurrent voice of Holy Writ? There is no arithmetic for suffering. Such computations, if they did not misrepresent or belittle the work of Christ, could convey no adequate sense of its Divine majesty and its unapproachable grandeur.

It were certainly far better that our lay-workers, possibly the ministry also, simply hold up the living Christ, once crucified for us that He might bring us to God; the Way, the Truth, the Life; to believe on whom is eternal life; and voice the invitation, "Whosoever will, let him come." Let us philosophize about the atonement in our studies, in the lecture-room, in the next world if we feel like it, before the people now if we are certain we can do it well and helpfully. Very few gifted men, even, succeed in doing it very helpfully. Many sadly blunder and falsify the truth, who can yet preach Christ crucified, risen, ascended, glorified, the Saviour to the uttermost of them who believe in Him, if they were content to do this only.

But what shall be said of a recent announcement from a prominent pulpit, that blood is an antiquated symbol, possibly needed by some, but outgrown by many; "once magnificently useful," but that now what is needed is, "That every man and every woman shall feel that they have a living Friend in Heaven." This is a need, boundless and insatiable—the living Christ! but it is the once crucified Christ, without the shedding of whose blood was no remission. He laid down His life the just

for the unjust, and "The life was in the blood." We must come to the living Christ, but it must be by the Cross of Calvary—it must be by and through the atonement. The last articulate words of Professor Tholuck were: "I am not afraid to die; Christ died for me." So has it been with saints of God without number. And that death, consequently that blood-shedding, is kept in eternal remembrance in the Song of Moses and the Lamb. It is no antiquated symbol. It is still, and will ever be, "magnificently useful." Because abused and materialized, do not let us go to a worse extreme—the extreme of ignoring the Cross and Passion of our Lord. In our joy that He has risen, let us not forget that He died for us, and that through His blood we have forgiveness of sins.

There are two extremes, very often met in lay-work, especially in times of revival, when the work of Christ is in hand. The one is to hold up a free salvation so as to ignore the law. "Christ paid it all, all the debt I owe." "Only believe." "All things are yours, only believe." Rightly taken, these are true sayings; but they have been so taken as to sweep away the very foundations of

morality. "Grace abounds, I need not concern myself further." "Grace abounds, all things are ours." Well, yes, only in righteousness—"that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Grace abounds, but as the death of sin. (What becomes of a recent, thoughtless assertion, "I can't keep the law. I don't care anything about the law!") "Jesus paid it all;" yes, go and sin no more. "Believe;" yes, but let it never slip out of thought, that in the New Testament, faith always implies a genuine repentance and a true obedience. The doctrine of free grace must never be severed from the obvious truths that move right along with it. It is a mischievous mistake to ignore them.

The other extreme fosters a legal spirit and does not make enough of grace. It belittles it as though the work of Christ needed a great deal of supplementing. We must make ourselves better before coming, and better after coming; and it is doing, doing, "deadly doing," not done, finished, dead to sin, alive to holiness in Christ, and *now; henceforth*, fruits of righteousness, lives of obedience and Christian virtue, just because salvation is complete

in Christ and we are saved. "Now are we the sons of God." Teaching that man's doings must supplement Christ's work is a mistaken guidance. Our doings are but good fruits from a tree made good.

2. Mistaken Appeals to Men.

Some appeals to men foster only selfishness. They do not exalt God, and the right and wrong of conduct and motive. To refer to expressions which it has been my misfortune to hear; "It's Heaven if you will." "You'll be damned if you don't." I do not so much question the truth of these blunt admonitions as the wisdom of making them the staple of appeal, or giving them very much prominence. Doubtless the fears of men are sometimes to be awakened; but it should not be forgotten that fear can only arrest, so that, perchance, the love of God in Christ—His goodness—may lead them to repentance. Even so, it is better to use the Scriptural language tenderly, feelingly, never fiercely and with declamatory embellishment. Neither the selfish fear of Hell nor desire of some sort of Heaven which is simply not Hell, will convert men. They may be set thinking;

but if ever men are saved, they will say, "We love Him because He first loved us." Hence it is clear, that no selfish consideration should be lifted so high or be so magnified as to hide the essential wrong and enormity of sin against God; or the essential beauty and rightness of love to God and obedience to His will; to bring men back to which, the love of God in Christ was lavished upon the world.

Of much the same sort is the "You'll be happy if you do." That is not a Biblical reason for repentance. It certainly has no place in the foreground. And yet it is the staple of many appeals—"You'll be happy if you do." If it were true, it is not the grand reason why men should obey the voice of the Lord. Happiness, light, rest, assurance, may not come at once, but as fruits of growth and products of experience in the kingdom. What then, when converts, so-called, find their expectations unrealized at once? The result is often very serious. No such expectations ought to have been awakened. Men ought to come to the Lord as worthy of boundless confidence, and be willing He should manifest Himself as seems good to Him, assured that He who loved them unto death will withhold no good thing from them

who believe and are obedient. He will call them by name and give them an experience of their own. The eternal rightness of the Divine claims ought to be enough to stir any soul; and the Divine love, enough to break any heart and lead to submission.

It is worse yet to say to men, "You'll find it easy to be a Christian if you'll only come." Indeed, this—I am sorry to say—very common argument in some quarters, is sometimes supplemented by the astounding statement that "It is just as easy to be a Christian as to turn your hand over." The Lord never puts it so. The apostles never seem to have found it so. They never deceive men to win them. Our Lord often thinned out His nominal followers by the most searching of tests and the most absolute of requirements; the apostles never represent the Christian life as a holiday affair. Who has any commission to say, it is an easy thing to be a Christian? Call up the Master's "He that forsaketh not all that he hath, verily I say unto you, he can not be my disciple!" That is not an easy thing to do, though a blessed one. Call up the New Testament figures of race, warfare, pilgrimage, overcoming, and so on. They do not look easy to be done. It

is a great thing to be a disciple indeed, and glorious as great. It so lies in the mind of the average worldly man. And it is well it is so. Leave it there.

Do not, then, try to accommodate the claims of Christ to the easy-going notions of men. This is to belittle them and deceive men. What will they do when really assailed by their spiritual foes if they have not had them in mind from the beginning?

3. *Mistaken Counsels.*

There are likewise mistaken counsels to inquirers. Men are really awakened and the inquiry comes, "What shall I do to be saved?" In the New Testament, the answer is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"—"Repent and be converted"—"Believe and be baptized." These directions are so put as to lay stress upon faith and repentance as an experience of the heart, baptism not being absolutely, though ordinarily essential.

It is hardly worth while to discuss which is prior in order of time, repentance or faith. The one implies the other, and in experience they are inseparable. "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." "Believe on the Lord Jesus

Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house.”
“Now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation.”

These are apostolic directions given to men in just such spiritual crises of their lives.

It is a mistake to interpose any preliminary work whatsoever between the soul and instantaneous submission to the will of God.

It is a mistake to parry the thrusts of the Spirit and truth of God which urge that duty is immediate.

It is a mistake, in any way, to imply that all things are not ready for the sinner just as he is, when in fact the only barrier to his immediate salvation is found in his own unyielding will.

To tell an awakened, inquiring soul to read the Bible, to reform his life, to go to meetings, to read some book or tract, to hear some preacher, are none of them Scriptural directions. It is your duty to give him a Scriptural reason for instant repentance and return to God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. But remember, the Bible does not tell inquiring men to go on inquiring, seeking, sorrowing. Why should we? This is just what a man who sees himself a sinner and Christ a Saviour should stop

doing, and begin believing, obeying, following, at once, this very moment. We may endeavor to arouse an indifferent person by any legitimate means—a book, a meeting, a sermon may do it. But upon an awakened soul, the need of going at once to Christ, to commit himself to Him as a Saviour and obey Him as Lord and Master, without qualification or reserve, should come with nothing to relieve the pressure, nor any intimation of anything to be done at some future time. This is the issue of the hour, clear, simple, and supreme. There let it remain and be settled, that guilt may no longer rest upon the soul. If it be not thus met, let the person be left with the conviction of duty unperformed, rather than comforted with such sayings as these: “Well, you will come out all right if you keep on.” Nothing could be more untrue. Keeping on, though accompanied with the utmost agony of spirit, but refusing to believe on Christ and yield Him a hearty obedience, is not to come out “all right,” but to continue wholly wrong. Nothing hinders acceptance and peace but an unyielding will.

It is a mistake to make salvation a thing of the future, or to so represent it. The future is with

God. "There may be other "nows" with Him, but we have to do only with the "now" that is passing, and the possibilities and duties lodged in it. The soul unsaved must not presume that to-morrow will be as this day. Behold, I stand—*now*—at the door and knock. The time to open is when the King stands and knocks. One secret of Mr. Finney's great success, as of Mr. Moody's, is found in this, that he offers a present good and urges men to close with it at once. It is the Scriptural way. The precedent is Apostolic.

It is of course a mistake, at such a time, to take up and discuss questions of casuistry. Sometimes inquiring souls seem stirred up to endless questioning, often quite irrelevant. They may concern hinderances which a word will remove, or doubts upon which light should be shed. Of course such a word should be spoken. But to men asking, "Can I be a Christian and do this and that?" "Do you think it is wrong to play cards, to go to the theater, to dance?" These are not questions to be answered, much less discussed at such a time. They are matters to be considered afterward. These things are now to be forsaken, *and all things else*. Afterward, in the light of the truth and Spirit of

God, by the aid of the wisest Christian counsel to be got at, these matters, if they again present themselves, are to be prayerfully settled. The one thing now in hand is to be saved, at any cost. Such questions at such a moment are an impertinent intrusion of the devil. A man can have no just appreciation of the situation who does not see that *all things* are to be laid down at the feet of Christ, and then *all things* adjusted with his new Master. And if he has not confidence enough in the Lord Jesus to do the things that He bids, to leave or take, as pleaseth Him, he is not prepared to commit the greater thing, the keeping of his soul, to Him.

When a man is drowning is no time to discuss the propriety of going to a dance that night. He wants to be saved from death—then he may not feel like dancing. When it comes home to a man, "I'm a lost sinner," the business in hand is too serious to allow of conditions and parleying. It is, "Christ only"—Christ at any cost to selfish pleasure or inclination.

A man taking up a hope in Christ with some such compromise is likely to be crippled for life. Misleading direction is a snare. Nobody has any

business to say to another, you can be a Christian and do this and that. Who has given to one man the prerogative of being conscience to another? Yet this hazardous thing is often done—perhaps since they have to do with the young, more frequently by Sunday-school teachers than others; and it is mischievous beyond telling.

Such questions generally reveal some darling sin, about which a contest rages. It is the strategic point. If that is yielded, the way is clear for all time to come. But let some spiritual quackery come in and fix it up so that the inquirer may keep his darling self-indulgence and have Christ too, and the harm of such mischievous advice will color a life-time, unless by and by a genuine conversion takes place.

It is well to say to persons beginning a Christian life, "Little by little your questionings will be answered—your doubts will clear up." Many of them will probably never more arise, when once Christ is taken as the life and light of the soul.

It is a mistake, usually, to take up a hope for another, and say: "You are all right now; there is no doubt of it." How do you know that? Who can read the secret of another's heart, so as to safely

say so much as this? Leave this with the Lord. A man will soon find out whether the Lord of glory is making His abode with him. This is a matter for self-revelation, to come to the consciousness as one waits on the Lord and filially does his duty. The Spirit witnesseth with our spirit—revealeth the fact—that we are the sons of God. So do not yield to the temptation to go before the Spirit of the Lord or to try and do His work. If a man does not find out that he loves the Lord and means to follow Him, most likely he does not. It is sometimes well to open to a timid, shrinking soul the evidences of discipleship, thus to help an honest person to a judgment of himself, but let the judgment be his own. Let us be careful not to encourage a delusion.

Such are some of the mistakes which other than laymen have made. But if we have rightly judged in the premises, they are blemishes which ought not to be suffered longer to mar our Christian work, whether lay or clerical. Our work culminates at the point where, face to face with the supreme duty of life, we try to lead men to Him who was lifted up that He might draw the world to His feet. At this point, imperatively, Scriptural clearness is a necessity to the Christian worker, whoever he may be.

VII.

THE LAY-WORKER'S SELF-CULTURE.

I PROCEED to indicate briefly some of the means of self-culture to be studiously seized as a part of the layman's equipment for Christian work.

Purposely our suggestions lie within the plane which is open to all. Other things being equal, the best-cultured man will be the most useful. The reason why culture often appears at disadvantage by the side of its opposite is, that other things are not equal. The man who does so well with no aid from the schools might do better if he were furnished with what the schools could do for him. It were well if every man who aspires to any of the more public forms of lay-work could avail himself of a brief course of study in Biblical theology and Biblical interpretation. This the lay-college aims to furnish among other things; this our Theological seminaries could more readily supply than any other agency, and do it on existing foundations. Few,

however, can avail themselves of such facilities, and the culture the larger number get must be acquired at odd moments and in leisure hours of which they have few.

Speaking to the many, let me presume that you use your native tongue correctly. For while bad grammar and mispronounced words do not absolutely disqualify for your work, they are spots on your armor that ought to be removed. They do not commend the Christian workman, much less are they to be gloried in or treated as matters of indifference. This is to be said, all the same, however illustrious the names, eminent in usefulness in spite of bad grammar. The wise will see that it is not their faults which give them their power.

It is also assumed that you feel the need of keeping your own heart warm and engaged in the Lord's work, and have learned how essential it is to cultivate a prayerful spirit, and to have your thoughts running much on sacred themes. To be deeply conscious of this is to have taken a long step toward securing it. It is easy to get out of practice in doing the Lord's work; and, hence, the need of having your thoughts charged and your heart aflame with it. But beyond all this—a foremost

means of culture for such a work is *intelligent study of the Scriptures*. Let emphasis fall on that word *study*, and that other word *intelligent*. For such study some adequate equipment is necessary beyond the use of one's faculties and the aid of the Spirit of God. I by no means think any man will find the Scriptures open to his understanding without the aid of the enlightening Spirit. But it is no less true that the Spirit will not teach Scripture geography and flood allusions to manners and customs with any radiance from heaven, unless it be through a Bible Dictionary or some wise commentary or book of travel in the lands made sacred by the wonders wrought by the power of God. A Concordance, a Bible Dictionary, a good text-book with maps, an Introduction to the books of the Bible, two or three well-chosen Commentaries, an Englishman's Greek Concordance, and such a thesaurus of sacred knowledge as Angus' Bible Hand-book, Barrows' Companion to the Bible, and Bissell's "Historic Origin of the English Bible," will not stand in the way of heavenly illumination, as many seem to think.

As a case in point, consider what a flood of light Conybeare and Howson and Mr. Lewin shed upon

the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St. Paul. There crops out now and then a disdainful remark about commentaries and such helps as I have named, encouraged by the foolish speeches of some fervid, but ignorant, evangelist, who is always telling how he and the Spirit of God get at the truth of the Bible; and whose interpretations suggest that it is much that *he*, and but little that the Spirit has had to do with them! How absurd it is for a man to declaim against a commentary, and then himself go on to make one on a passage of Scripture, and urge its acceptance by a waiting audience. The conceit of the thing is amazing! We need to learn the difference between the discreet use of what wiser men than we have seen, or thought they saw, by the aid of the same Holy Spirit, and a servile acceptance of anybody's views of Holy Scripture. Obviously enough, the Holy Spirit is not more likely to work with ignorance than with learning—with undisciplined than with disciplined mind! The child-like Spirit is the essential thing in either, and experience proves that this is more likely to be found with great learning than with little. Conceit generally dwells with ignorance. We may honor the Holy Ghost

quite as much by giving heed to His suggestions through saintly and gifted souls as when filtered through our own willing minds. This much is said in rebuke of a foolish prejudice against the use of "helps" in the study of the Scriptures. We should have had a good deal less nonsense in the shape of interpretation if some of our "Bible-readers" had been more free in the use of them.

We need intelligent study of the Scriptures, that we may use them just as they were meant to be used—that the word may mean to us just what it did in the mind of the Lord, or of David, Isaiah, and Paul. How is it better for orthodox than for unorthodox people to use the Scriptures in accommodation to the matter they happen to have in hand? The obvious sense they yield as the words lie in the record, is worth all diligent search; and when found, that sense, and that only, is given us to take to our own heart and teach to others.

It may be desirable to know how many books there are in the Bible, and to be able to recite their names in order, but I must think the value of such knowledge a little exaggerated in these times. Doubtless the more one knows *about* the Bible the better, but do not let us linger too long at the

vestibule of the temple, lest we have no time for the temple itself.

Upon the evidences of its inspiration, answering the question, How do you know the Bible is from God? we may well spend time enough to give an intelligent answer, since it will often be thrust upon us. But for a life-time the Book itself will open its wonderful stores and invite our most careful and prayerful research. Upon methods of Biblical study I do not enter; but the importance of the study as a qualification for lay-work may be enforced, as lying within the scope of this treatise.

(a). The Bible-truth is the sword of the Spirit, and our work is nothing without the Spirit. We must needs be in agreement with Him in the weapon we are to use.

(b). The Bible contains the message we are to take to men—the invitations, warnings, promises, hopes. We need our quiver full of these truths. The hammer of God's Word is to break in pieces the flinty heart. God's truth is to be set over against the speculations of men—its certainty over against the human guess—its high and safe tower over against the refuges of lies. "God saith," is a tremendous word to put before a sentence, and let

fly at the castle of the human soul. "God saith." And just because you want to be able to say that, and say it often, you solemnly need to beware of fanciful interpretations and hastily formed opinions of the Word of God. No man can afford to ignore all the commentaries and scholarship of men familiar with the original tongues of Scripture. Do not put "God saith" before what He never said.

(c). The Bible contains the inexhaustible material for discourses, addresses, and conversations with men in regard to their souls. Not only so, there is an eternal freshness about it. Hence the difference between men who are always full of Scripture and in consequence always fresh; and others who are empty and forever telling the story of their conversion, what sort of people they were before that time, and what they have been about since, and in consequence always dull, or stagey, or suspiciously exaggerated in statement.

I by no means wish to be understood as disparaging all allusions to experience; but this should not be the staple of our talk or discourse. One would suppose it tiresome to say over the same thing forty or fifty times, as beyond a doubt it is tedious to hear. And if the story of a matter of

fact be not the same thing over and over, it is lying, to which there is a dangerous temptation in the case of a man with whom this is his stock in trade. Our speech needs to be saturated with God's Word. Then it will be mighty. Then we have resource. Then there is good reason why we should stand up and speak out of the abundance of our heart. Unless a man is willing to take pains to so qualify himself, it is questionable whether he has any very urgent call to lift up his voice in the name of the Lord.

(d). Still further, there is no such stock of apt illustration anywhere to be found as in the Bible. Its characters, its history, its parables, its wise sayings, what a relief from the story-telling, thin, gossip talk of some men who use up so much precious time and leave us so empty, and often so unsatisfied, suspiciously questioning how much truth there was in those "tales from real life." There is stimulus in Biblical illustrations. They really illuminate something. They have perspective and color. They were winnowed out of centuries of life, under Divine guidance, as worth handing down to the end of time in the One Book upon which God puts His imprint. They live,

they speak, they instruct, they barb the arrow we let fly, and they stick! Perhaps it is natural for a man who is not a story-teller and can not be one, to undervalue this species of illustration; yet for such a man, a pertinent illustration, drawn from the Bible and fitly used, will have a charm of which he never tires.

(e). Then, again, what is the world really hungry for? What does it need? Possibly it does not know. But we know. Not the wisdom of men, but the wisdom of God. Something for heart-aches and guilty consciences, and doubts and fears, the bread of God, the water of life, a promise sure as the eternal throne, a hope springing from the living rock and cleaving the skies, an anchor of the soul. Nothing of all this is met by pumping at our shallow cisterns. We must draw from the wells of salvation, which are deep and unfailing as God. Do not offer men the stone of human conceit or the froth of vanity. Give them bread. Give them a staff of promise. Make a pillow for them of the truth. Give them wings of hope. Be a Samaritan indeed.

Hence I say, study the Bible intelligently. Make it your resource. Good "Bible-reading" is about

the most sensible way for a layman to do wise, sound, effective work. But then, it needs to be good, simple, natural, logical; not strained, forced, exaggerated—about nineteen per cent. of Bible to one of the man. Is that an easy thing to do? Let him be a torch-bearer, God's word the torch throwing him into shadow. The mariner in a storm makes little account of the wonderful masonry of the light-house, but the blazing reflection of light is his salvation.

2. *Next to the Bible, study men.* Books will not help you much here. The best methods are not mapped out. The man that has done it will find it difficult to tell another how. But study men for yourselves. Your subjects are all about you. Learn to read them, that you may know how to approach them—how not to “rub the wrong way”—how not to be captious with men—how to give them the line and let them have their own way within certain reasonable limits—how to let them think their opinions, on many things, all they fancy them, when no harm can come of them—how to silence an opposer without controversy—how to tell when a man is talking for effect, to cover up a guilty conscience—how to respect

honest doubt and help it. This is a great matter. A little universe is man, and men are a study for a life-time.

I know one man—a good, earnest minister of the Gospel—who is so foolish just here. If there is a sore spot about you he will hit it—if any humbling thing you will hear from it. He will differ in opinion to the ninety-nine-hundredth of an inch, when the matter in hand is so trivial that you do not care if he is all right and you are all wrong. Oh, such a faculty for making mountains of mole-hills, and seeing if you are out of perpendicular the one-eighth of an inch! Such a faculty for “rubbing the wrong way.” Study men.

3. *Try to be good feeders, learners, listeners, readers.* Do not be always on the rampage. Go aside now and then, and rest awhile. Listen to others. Fill in. Why pump a dry well? Be jealous of your Sabbaths, and listen to preaching, if it is “not remarkable,” and the calls from Macedonia be never so loud. I do not believe they are so loud that laymen are called to habitually leave their church and their minister and hear only their own voice and its echo. No man can preach, no man can follow up public assemblies and speak well who does not

take time to feed his own mind and augment his own resources. It is true of ministers as well as laymen—but the former are supposed to have that as a part of their calling, while the latter must seize it outside their ordinary callings, if at all. At this point an intelligent, spiritual ministry ought to be helpful to lay-workers. But besides this, if you can, go into the desert and read, and think, and pray. Sit down and hear other men for a little. In some way, your own way, be good feeders of your own souls if you would not starve others, or give them chaff for wheat. May they be few who go out to do the Lord's work having starved their own soul. A great fire will generate no steam if there be no water in the boiler. There must be water as well as fire.

The need everywhere is men who are taught in the Scriptures and kindled by the Holy Ghost into a consuming zeal for the winning of souls to Christ.

VIII.

CONCLUSION.

I HERE conclude these familiar remarks upon matters of great interest to the Church at large, but especially to earnest, but inexperienced, workers in the world's harvest-field. The Church of Christ must needs concern herself, not only with the supply of laborers, but with the quality of their work no less. The harvest is always plenteous and the laborers always relatively few. The Master has bidden us, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest." And every disciple, having ears to hear, may distinctly catch the words, "Go work to-day in my vineyard." Two very unequivocal duties are thus laid upon every disciple.

Presumably the laborers are concerned to do their work well—to fill their place in the best possible way; especially since "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless

come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." "And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together."

There comes quickly after this assurance, the serious responsibility of being "A workman that needeth not to be ashamed;" at the very least, of never lying open to the charge of being a blind leader of blind men into the ditch of doubt, or unbelief, or careless and ill-gounded hope; or finding them there, then of not lying under the charge of being impotent to lead them out.

If the work of laymen, as seems likely for some time to come, is to lie, in no small degree, in the promotion of revivals of religion, then it is of the utmost importance that they study to be Scripturally prepared to guide men straight into the way of life, by the simplest road, and leave them with clear ideas of how they came there, and for what, and how to go on, and whereunto. And since no benevolent work has a right to be called Christian whose ultimate aim is not to present Christ as a Saviour of sinners and to exalt Him as Lord over

all, the necessity for such preparation would seem to be always imminent.

It is earnestly hoped that nowhere in these pages has the impression been left that what a Christian *does* is of more account than what he *is*. Let it not be once thought that all we have to do is to be active. If we are to have an activity that will command respect and be effective for good without great discount for needless blunders and crudeness, there must be intelligent piety and consistent Christian character behind it. The culture of such a piety, the building up of such a character, the living of a noble life, calls for something besides attention to the activities, so-called, of the local church or the Christian Association. It ought to be apparent that being eager to do good, we must give diligent heed to being good. And being active is not the only culture needful to personal holiness and unselfish devotion to the glory of God.

It is to be accounted a grand and blessed thing to live in this day when the battle thickens on every side and great issues are opening every hour; but it can never be such to a sluggish or indifferent

soul. If appreciated for what it is, we must needs bestir ourselves and arm for the conflict. This passes for an intelligent age. It is a reading age. And if somewhat superficial, it is yet quick to detect whether a man has anything to say, is in earnest, is posted on the themes he handles, has settled convictions for which he is ready to give a reason.

So let no man presume to go unsent, to go unarmed, or refuse any service to which the Master really calls. Giving all diligence to be furnished for your work, with an answer ready for the hope that is in you, and an unwavering conviction that Christ is the world's need and the only Saviour, and with a deep and tender sympathy for men as men, go forth: to return at length bringing your sheaves with you, to lay them as trophies at the feet of our risen Lord and Redeemer. To Him be glory, and dominion, and power, forever and ever.

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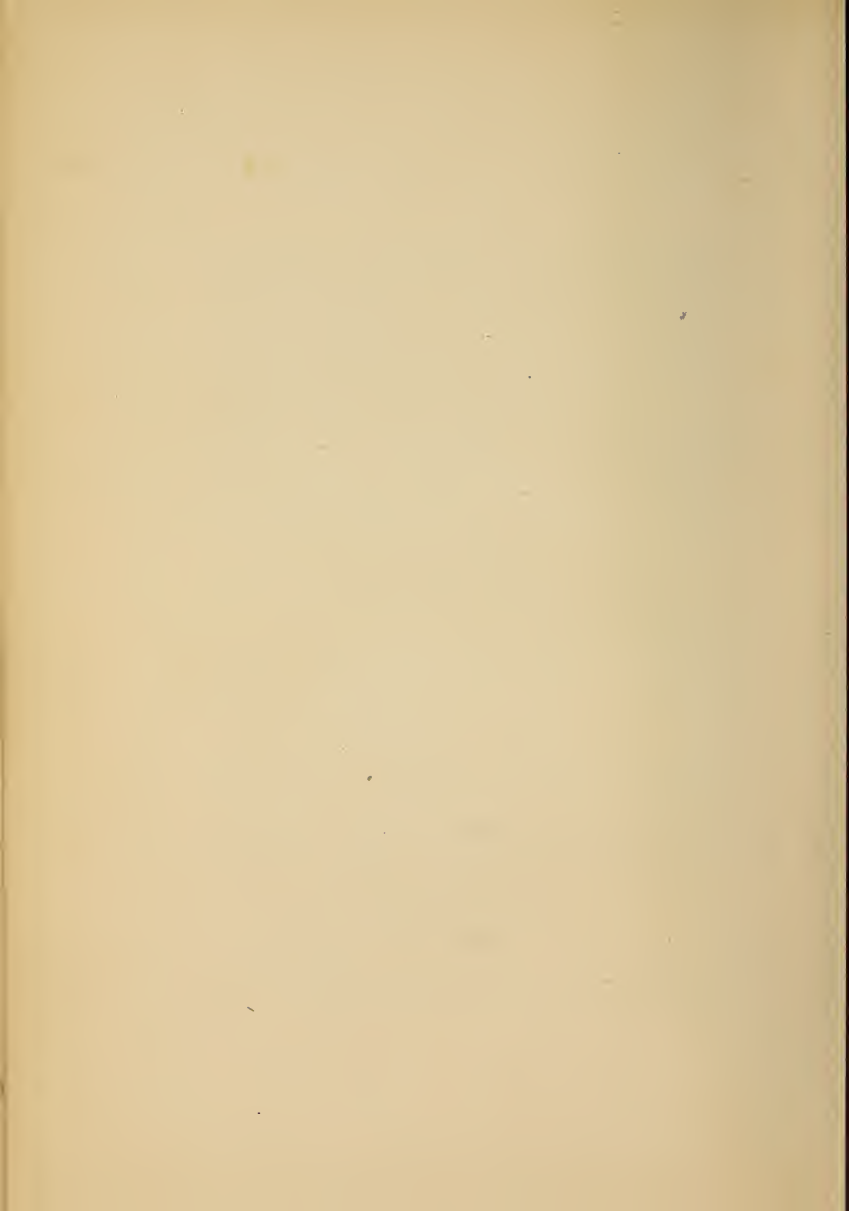
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